

Wanderers quiz fans—where do you want your football?

COME ON you Blues supporters! Here's the chance to air your views over the suggestion that Wycombe Wanderers should leave their ground at Loakes Park to make way for the expansion of the hospital.

The club's new ground could be on a 20-acre site at Four Ashes, situated in the countryside at the north end of the town, with parking facilities for up to 3,000 cars.

But before any firm decisions are made, the local authority involved, Wycombe Rural District Council, the football club and the hospital board have asked the public to have their say on the issue.

One fact emerged at a Press conference called by the three parties on Thursday afternoon. The club will not accept any idea of a "second best" solution to the problem — Mr. Jack Smethurst, chairman of the club and a trustee, and fellow trustee, Mr. John Timberlake, made that quite clear.

"We mustn't burn our last boat," said Mr. Timberlake.

Talks about the proposed move have been going on for some time, involving the county council, High Wycombe Borough Council, Wycombe Rural Council, Marlow Urban Council as well as the club trustees and the hospital board.

The hospital pressed home their case for more land to build urgently needed extensions.

This is a rapidly expanding area, and the demand for hospital facilities has increased year after year.

But the club is loathe to leave its six-and-a-half acre site at Loakes Park — ideally placed in the centre of the town and within easy walking distance for the majority of their supporters.

'It makes me shudder'

"It makes me shudder that we have got to move out," said Mr. Timberlake on Thursday.

In a prepared statement, the parties involved revealed that alternative sites for the football ground had been considered at Booker Airfield, Kingsmead, Gomm Valley and Sands, but

all had to be discarded for one reason or another.

The choice was narrowed to two in the Hazlemere area, one at Rockhalls Farm, and the other to the east of Uplands and to the South west of Widmer End. But the Uplands site is in the Green Belt and is not likely to be acceptable on planning grounds.

Consideration was given also to a suggestion that the hospital board could develop a site other than one adjacent to Wycombe General Hospital.

But at a meeting in June last year the parties came to the conclusion that the area near Rockhalls Farm should be considered as a possible alternative site for the football club.

By ALAN HUNT

The meeting accepted that no further progress could be made until a planning application to use the area had been lodged on behalf of the club.

This has now been done and it will be considered not only on its merits in accordance with normal planning policies, but with the essential hospital needs which prompted the application very much in the background.

The application has been lodged by the club trustees, which describes them as "prospective purchasers," and they have served notice on the owner, Mr. J. A. Viccars, of "Brands House", Four Ashes, and on his tenant, Mr. J. Eggleton, of Rockhalls Farm.

But the 20-acre site at the farm is part of area H7 which is referred to in the recently published High Wycombe and District Planning Review as a possible area for residential development.

The site could be affected, too, by the line of a major relief

road designed to take traffic off the London-Amersham road and Amersham Hill and route it down neighbouring Green Hill into the Hughenden Road.

Highway re-action

The rural council will have to await the reactions of the county highway authorities on this.

Similarly, they may have to await the outcome of a planning appeal which is likely to be lodged by the owners of land in area H7 — which includes Rockhalls Farm — who were recently refused permission by the rural council to develop it for housing.

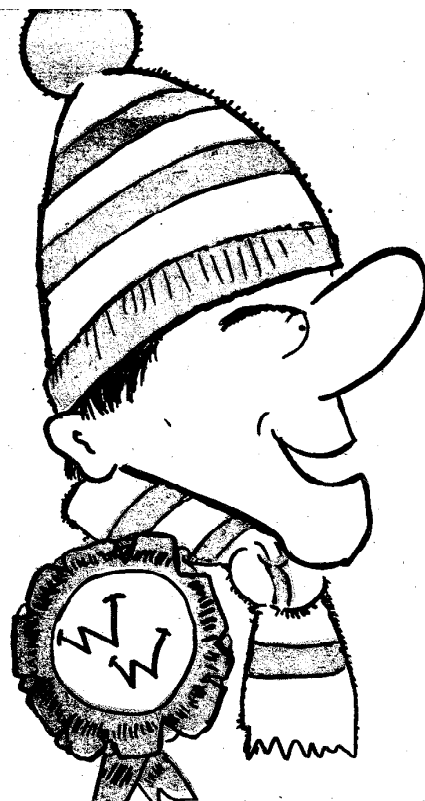
The Press statement points out that if the council decides that the football club's application should be refused the hospital board "will have to deal with their problem in the light of such a decision."

It adds: "The Rural District Council feels that this is a matter of the utmost public concern both in the need to see that not only are hospital services of the highest possible standard made available for the existing and continually increasing population, but the important social and recreational services provided by a progressive football club of extremely high repute are retained for the benefit and enjoyment of that same population."

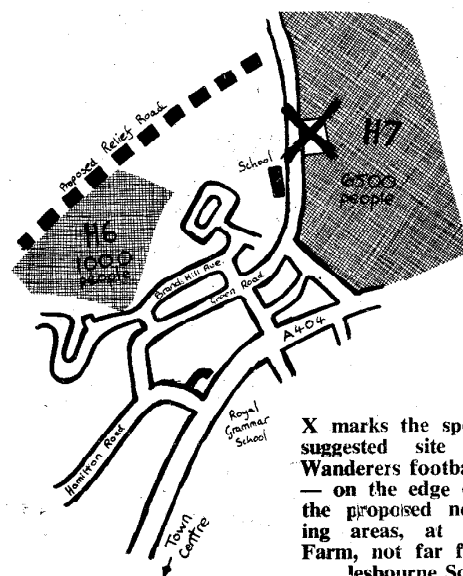
"They would therefore welcome any comments from the public on this most important planning application in order to assist in the decision which has to be made."

Not second best

Mr Timberlake said at the conference that he would "die happy" if the Wanderers got a good and permanent ground. "But," he added, "I don't want them to be put in a second best place."



Loakes Park to Rockhalls Farm



X marks the spot — suggested site for Wanderers football ground — on the edge of one of the proposed new housing areas, at Rockhalls Farm, not far from Walsbourne School.

Mr. Smethurst agreed, pointing out that if that was ever the case the club "would not leave" — unless forced to by a compulsory purchase order.

The club trustees had to answer to a good many thousand people, said Mr. Timberlake, and "we have got to satisfy our conscience that we have done the best for our club."

The public are invited to send their comments on the application to the Engineer and Surveyor, Wycombe Rural Council, Bellfield House, 80 Oxford Road, High Wycombe, as soon as possible, quoting reference WR/3134/72.

UP THE BLUES! LET'S
HAVE YOUR VIEWS!



Supporter Philip Mayers from Widmer End wasn't too happy with the idea of a move from Loakes Park, which was so convenient.



Speaking personally Wanderers president, Mr. Monty Seymour, thought that the move was inevitable.



Mr. Arthur Belcher, 75, from Warren Wood Drive, thought the club should move if a suitable site could be found.

MOST SAY 'MOVE'

SHOULD Wycombe Wanderers move out of Loakes Park to Four Ashes? Views of club fans and townsfolk were divided on the issue over the weekend — but a slight majority came out in favour of the move, when 'Mid-week' conducted its own quiz.

The two deciding factors for most people were that priority must go to the hospital and that if handled properly the move could be of great benefit to the club.

Those against were generally the younger fans without their own transport or the older ones who at present walk from the town to the ground.

Falling gates

In the middle was a hard core of people in favour of the move — fans with their own trans-

port who would welcome a decent car park and others, including fans, placed the hospital first.

Tony Lewis and George Middleton probe town and ground

Uppermost in many people's minds was the general trend of falling attendances in amateur football — this season Wanderers' gate has dropped by a half over the last season when, admittedly, they were on top.

With the revision of amateur-professional status for the 1974-75 season whereby the amateur distinction disappears, Isthmian League type clubs — such as Wanderers — can hope for a spectator revival.

A new ground with a car-park for up to 3,000 cars, modern stands, a level pitch and what will probably be a better standard of football could be just the change the Wanderers need.

Several fans thought that this could be the biggest thing to happen in High Wycombe since the war and suggestions

abounded for how the move could be made to work.

Involve local building firms, local companies, make sure the ground is one of the best of its kind in the country, help those without transport by laying on special buses. These were just a few ideas.

As 'Mid-week' reported last week, the Wanderers, the hospital board and Wycombe Rural Council want to hear the views of people. They should send them to the Engineer and Surveyor, Wycombe Rural Council, Bellfield House, 80 Oxford Road, High Wycombe as soon as possible quoting reference WR/3134/72.

For more views given in the 'Mid-week' Quiz, turn to page 9.

The Wanderers could do a Hereford in ten years

SAY SIX ARDENT SUPPORTERS

IF THEY went about things the right way Wycombe Wanderers could emulate Hereford United within 10 years and aim for the First Division of the Football League within 20 years.

This is the view of eight regular supporters from Broom and Wades who had a session on the subject.

They have sent their views from Hughenden Avenue to Wycombe Rural Council as well as 'Mid-week.' And this is what they say—

"I was most interested in 'Mid-week' front page article on the prospects of a new ground for our great local team Wycombe Wanderers.

Now to get a varied view, eight of us regular supporters had a "teach-in" after lunch at our local factory, Broom and Wades, and this may come as a surprise, six felt it would be the ideal time to move for several reasons.

At the crossroads

Perhaps the most important points are as follows:

(1) This season finds "The Blues" at the crossroads after three excellent seasons.

(2) Following on from the above the decline of the Wanderers' fortunes has, if the game against Sutton United last Saturday can be used as an example, cut attendances from the previous season by around two-thirds and mid-week games are only attracting about the same, sometimes even less, sensational to say the least!

(3) Although promises of ground levelling, a new clubhouse, and other amenities have been forthcoming over many years, nothing has materialised and it may now be too late.

If the new ground could be playable by the season after next this could be just in time for the new F.A. ruling over amateur-professional status and every effort should be made to involve the whole town and adjoining areas from top to bottom so we can build over the next 4 or 5 years the best stadium either amateur or professional within at least a 35-mile radius of the London area.

And why not? The majority of us agreed we could

emulate Hereford United within 10 years and aim for the First Division within 20 years.

Business could help

Again why not!

Wycombe is a boom town with rich industry, much of which businesses like Murrays, Marks and Spencer and Sainsbury's have benefited over the success of the Wanderers over the past three seasons, and other local names like Gommies, Ercols and Parker-Knoll, who have derived benefit indirectly.

Remember much of the Wanderers' following is from out of town and football supporters invariably drive their wives in to shop while they watch the game, sometimes many thousands.

Other companies who have felt the benefit of the Wanderers success could help supporters without their own transport, especially old age pensioners. I refer to Jeff-way Coaches of which I believe, Mr. John Timberlake a Wanderers' trustee, is a leading shareholder and who must have taken thousands of pounds off supporters to away matches and, of course, London Transport who run the Four Ashes route (coaches and buses could be put on special at reduced fares).

And when the stadium materialises the companies such as Gommies and Murrays could possibly do the seating and furnishings at a moderate price and perhaps, Wrights of Great Missenden, the most respected local builder construct the stands and adjoining buildings with local labour.

Yes, the possibilities are enormous and these suggestions have come from only a few supporters and with perhaps ideas from your other letters this if handled with courage could be the greatest undertaking in Wycombe since the war.

You asked for suggestions. The easiest thing to do is discard this letter as impracticable, but remember I gave up an evening to give our views on paper.

And how about Ernest Turners to do the floodlighting? If Wembley can spend £35,000, with all the town participating, so can the "Wanderers."—**"SIX ARDENT SUPPORTERS."**

FOOTBALL COMPLEX

AN application to build a football complex at Four Ashes, High Wycombe, went before the planning committee of Wycombe Rural District Council last week.

The proposal includes a football stadium, offices, clubroom, changing rooms, playing and practice pitches, covered seating terraces and car parks.

If built, the current home of Wycombe Wanderers at Loakes Park will be taken up by expansion of Wycombe General Hospital.

The RDC called a special press conference and released a statement to bring the public up to date on the proposed development which it considers to be "most important."

October 1971

The statement, printed here in full in the interests of the public, traces the history of the proposal since the RDC entered into discussions.

A meeting was convened by Oxford Regional Hospital

Board and the trustees of Wycombe Wanderers FC on 6 October 1971 to discuss the board's proposals to acquire Loakes Park to proceed with further essential hospital building and development.

Representatives of the County Council, Wycombe RDC, Marlow UDC, Wycombe BC and other local authorities were present together with trustees of Wycombe Wanderers FC and members of the Hospital Board.

Working party

This meeting decided that a working party of officers of the interested local authorities together with those of the board and football club should consider alternative solutions to the problems associated with the board's proposals and to achieve this the working group would receive and consider advice on the implications of (a) the Regional Hospital Board having to develop a site other than adjacent to Wycombe General Hospital and (b) the trustees of the Wycombe Wanderers Football Club having a move to a new site.

After a number of meetings of the officers

concerned, the working group decided at their final meeting on 27 April 1972 to re-convene the meeting of the representatives of the authorities concerned together with the board and trustees in order to submit their report.

The full story

This meeting took place on 8 June last year and came to the conclusion that an area near Rockhalls Farm should be considered as a possible alternative site for the football club.

Two sites

During the deliberations of the working party, which had to accept that the trustees would only consider an alternative site within or adjoining the existing urban area, a number of alternatives such as Booker Airfield, Kingsmead, Gomm Valley and Sands were considered all of which had to be discarded for one reason or another.

Two sites in the Hazlemere area, one in the vicinity of Rockhalls Farm and the other to the east of Uplands and to the southwest of Widmer End commended themselves to the football club, but the latter was not likely to be acceptable on planning grounds as it is in the green belt.

The meeting on 8 June which favoured consideration being given to a site near Rockhalls Farm also accepted that no further progress could be made unless and until a planning application to use an area in the vicinity was submitted by or on behalf of the football club.

This has now been done and it has to be considered not only on its merits in accord with normal planning policies but with the essential

hospital needs which in fact promulgated the application, very much in the background.

Several consultations have to take place before the district council can make a decision, the most important being with the highway authority which has to consider the implications of the proposed development in relation to the highway proposals suggested in the recent consultation High Wycombe and District Review Document.

As the county council was represented on the working group of all officers it is hoped that the highway observations will be available without delay.

Advertise

When consultations are complete the district council will have to make a decision and if it considers that permission should be given they will have to advertise the proposal receive and consider any representations that might be made, notify the Department of the Environment, and if the Department does not intend to intervene in the determination of the application to obtain the concurrence of the county council before granting any permission.

If the council decides that permission should be refused none of the foregoing procedure will be necessary and the hospital board will have to deal with their problem in the light of such a decision.

The rural council feels that this is a matter of the utmost public concern both in the need to see that not only hospital services of the highest possible standard made available for the existing and continually increasing population, but the important social and recreational services provided by a progressive football club of extremely high repute are retained for the benefit and enjoyment of that same population.

They would therefore welcome any comments from the public on this most important planning application in order to assist in the decision which has to be made.

These should be sent to the Engineer and Surveyor, Wycombe RDC, Bellfield House, 80 Oxford Road, High Wycombe.

This is what they thought—in the town and on the terraces

here is what some of them said.

First over to Peter Lacey a fan from Hazlemere.

"In my view the hospital has got to come first," he said. "I don't want to see them move. I think it will stop a lot of the older people coming. But if a break was made, it must be a clean one," he added.

Philip Mayers from Widmer End, a Wanderers follower for about four years, wasn't too happy with the idea of a move from Loakes Park.

"It's so convenient at the moment, especially for the youngsters. I don't think the car park will make much difference to most people." A car driver himself, Mr. Mayers, said that he would still go to the games, whether they be at Four Ashes or Loakes Park.

One of the youngsters without transport was David Baker from Wooburn Green. "It will be a bit grim," was his verdict on thoughts about a move.

But he also saw it as a chance to have a better crowd and he said that he would still get to the games somehow.

Fellow fan John Lacey of Princes Risborough was another who thought the hospital should come first—and he hopes that

by the time any move is complete he will have a car!

One person definitely in favour of the move was Jack Atkins who lives in Hazlemere. "It's a good opportunity from every point of view and people will still go," he said.

But three younger fans were against it. "I think it will move the ground away from a central position. The hospital could be extended up Marlow Hill," said Peter Oxbrow from Bowerdean, High Wycombe.

Ian Leigh from Stokenchurch was also against. He thought a move to Four Ashes would be less convenient.

And Richard Holliman who lives in Priory Avenue, High Wycombe, was opposed to the idea because he thought it would ruin the crowds. But he hopes to be driving if and when any move is completed.

In the town centre on Friday many other people were asked what they thought of the move.

One man, who asked to be nameless, said: "I think it's bloody stupid. If they go all up there they'll lose a hell of a lot of supporters."

From a group of youngsters came a reply that to some extent substantiated the more earthy reply above—"I don't think they should go. It's too far away. I don't think I shall be able to go on my own. My Dad takes me in the car but he can't take me every week."

Seventy-five-years-old Mr. Arthur Belcher, of 22 Warren Wood Drive, High Wycombe, considered that if the move would be beneficial to the hospital and if the club had a suitable alternative site, they should move.

Mrs. D. E. Adams, a building society clerk said: "I think they should move really. The only



Jack Atkins from Hazlemere thought the move a good opportunity from every point of view.

trouble is, it's a long way out isn't it?"

One of Mrs. Adams' custom-



We need sport in the town, but we need a bigger hospital more.—Mrs. S. Dean.

ers, Mrs. S. Dean, of Leas Close, Totteridge, a Wanderers' supporter very fairly said: "Well,



Mrs. D. E. Adams thought that the Wanderers should move — the only trouble — it was a long way out.

we do need sport in the town, but we do need a bigger hospital. It's a big town you know."

Said Mr. Monty Seymour, president of the Wanderers: "This is my own personal opinion. I want to make that clear. I think a move is inevitable. Naturally we would rather stay at Loakes Park, because Loakes Park is Wycombe Wanderers."

"If we don't move a compulsory purchase order could quite easily be arranged."

When we asked if he thought the club would lose a lot of supporters he said: "Like any team, if we are successful we shall get the supporters. But I feel sorry for the older supporters—the old age pensioners and those not able to walk very far. I would like to see some provision made to get them up to Four Ashes—that is if we go there."

Back to the cold sparsely scattered terraces as disappointed supporters began to leave after that goalless draw with Ilford.

"Many more games like this and I wouldn't cross the street to watch them."

But then that's the life of a football fan—up in the boughs one season, down in the dumps the next.

STORY—TONY
LEWIS AND
GEORGE
MIDDLETON
PICTURES—
BOB MEAD



The hospital has got to come first, Peter Lacey. "It will be a bit grim," David Baker.



It's too far to walk, we won't be able to go, a crowd of youngsters in the town told reporter George Middleton.



Left to right, Peter Oxbrow, "extend the hospital up Marlow Hill." Ian Leigh, "don't move." Richard Holliman, "a move will ruin crowds."